

The Debates¹

Thu., Sept. 30	1 st presidential debate	Domestic policy	Fox	Coral Gables, FL
Tue., Oct. 5	<i>Vice presidential</i> debate	Open Forum	ABC	Cleveland, OH
Fri., Oct. 8	2 nd presidential debate	Townhall-Open	NBC	St. Louis, MO
Wed., Oct 13	3 rd presidential debate	Foreign policy	(tba)	Tempe, AZ

All debates are 9:00 -10:30p.m. ET, before a live audience

Format

In the first and third presidential debates and in the vice presidential debate the candidates will be seated at a table with the moderator. The second presidential debate will use the town meeting format in which undecided voters, selected by the Gallup Organization, will question the candidates.

Each debate will have a different single moderator to be selected by the Commission on Presidential Debates. The four moderators will be announced no later than Sept. 10.

The moderators' job in the first and third presidential debates and the vice presidential debate will be to introduce and change topics, to ensure that the participants have equal time, and to encourage some direct exchange among the candidates. The moderators will select all topics and questions. The moderators will have discretion to ask follow-up questions in all debates

In the town meeting debate, the town meeting participants will pose their questions to the candidates. The town meeting participants will review their questions with the moderator before the debate for the sole purpose of avoiding duplicate questions.

Before the Debate

Focus your attention on a few key points. Know what it is you want in a president, then watch and listen for which candidate best fits your ideal. The following suggestions will help you focus:

- | Don't watch a debate to determine a winner or loser. Focus on the question, "Who will make a better president?"
- | Set aside partisan views. Use the debates to learn as much as possible about the candidates and their positions.
- | Pay close attention to the candidates when they talk about how to solve problems. Listen carefully for comparisons made between their programs and their opponent's.
- | Identify the candidate's debate strategy. Does the candidate speak directly to the issues, provide specifics, and present new policies or information? Or does the candidate evasively interpret questions to suit his agenda?
- | Identify the images that candidates try to create for themselves. Most candidates portray themselves as leaders identified with cherished American values while suggesting that their opponents lack these qualities. What in their responses supports their claims?
- | Be aware of the technical limitations of live televised debates. Television works by showing action. To create action and minimize monotony, directors include "reaction shots" to show one candidate's response to the other's statement. This can distract from what is being said.
- | Consider the questions asked by the moderator. The essence of debate is comparison and contrast. Did the moderator's questions encourage alternative viewpoints? Observe and evaluate the questions asked.

¹ The CPD is the non-partisan, non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that has sponsored all general election presidential debates since 1987. www.debates.org. © 2004 Commission on Presidential Debates. All rights reserved.